

A WOLF HUNT IN FRANCE.

BY ZU BEFEHL.



THE wolves in France would have all been killed long ago but for the *louveteiers* or wolf hunters. Instituted several hundred years ago for the destruction

of the ravenous beasts, this office has really tended to their preservation and has thus kept an exciting sport alive to our times.

The forests in which wolves are known to exist always rent for a large sum for shooting purposes. The French *louveteier* is a man of wealth and popularity, holding the same social position as an English master of hounds, and he regards a wolf in the same light as the Englishman does a fox. About two thousand wolves are killed annually and with a great deal of ceremony, the rules and regulations, the restrictions as to time and place, and the picturesque costumes of the huntsmen giving the sport some of the romance and pageantry of the past. The hunters are armed with rifles and dogs drive the wolves out of cover. It is doubtful if any dog can successfully attack a wolf. There is certainly none in France, for after partaking in thirty odd wolf hunts, in which dogs of all shapes and sizes joined, I never knew one French dog to bite a wolf. No matter how courageous the animal, the innate ferocity of the wild wolf always gave it the advantage right off, for the steel-trap jaws would snap a dog to pieces before it could get a hold, and at the first wound the boldest dog would slink howling away.

I lost a fine dog of the Great Dane breed and captured a wolf cub on a hunt near the Spanish frontier in 1879. It was one of the most successful hunts held for many a year in point of the number of wolves killed, and must have considerably thinned the lupine population, as 216 fell to our rifles. The presence of the hunting members of the royal house of Savoy and of some of the most celebrated European sportsmen called for a display of such elaborate arrangements and fanci-

ful costumes as are seldom seen in these practical days.

For a long time ahead scores of beaters had been looking up the lairs, and on the night before the hunting day hundreds of holes were stopped up. Wolves are nocturnal prowlers and gluttonous feeders, and on returning at dawn to sleep and finding their retreats blocked most of them lay down near by.

Early on the appointed day the wolves were driven out of their fastnesses by a vast number of dogs and a crowd of men quaintly dressed in a livery of blue slashed with gold lace and carrying great horns. The din of these peculiar musical instruments kept the animals stirring, and several packs broke from cover and made for the wild uplands of the Pyrénees.

The hunters numbered about forty and were divided into two parties, each stretched in a long line on the borders of the southern forests toward which the wolves were to be driven. Up among the wild, rough mountain scenery, far from the rush and noise of the modern age, dressed in the fanciful embroideries of the olden times, for we wore three-cornered hats and dark-green hunting suits faced with gold and scarlet braid and were armed with the old-time muzzle-loading rifle, it required no difficult effort to imagine one's self belonging to an earlier age. And when the game came in sight this feeling was intensified, for it seemed impossible that such a great number of wolves could be brought naturally together in a modern civilized country.

My dog Hector was with me, and when he caught sight of the approaching wolves he crouched by my side, showing his fangs and keeping up a continual low growl. Here they come, over one hundred wolves, rushing along like a flock of sheep toward a stretch of forest that seemed to offer a secure cover. But when the leaders of the pack came within fifty yards a long stretch of flame shot out from the underwood, and before the echoing roll of the report had died away fifteen wolves were kicking their last and several others were rolling about and licking their wounds. Barbarous as sport may seem to some, there is a savage in-

stinct in our natures that seems satisfied when a grim brute falls a victim to our prowess.

The wolf is a prudent animal, but no coward, and when a pack of them decide

around and gnashing their teeth, as if calculating their chance of success in a combined attack. None of us spoke; we were too busy with our muzzle loaders—*I remember pushing home a double*



AGAINST LONG ODDS.

to attack it means war to the death. When that death-dealing hail of bullets tore through their ranks a howl of rage and defiance came out of their blood-red throats. Not a wolf turned tail, but with a fierce courage they faced us, leaping

charge. There were nearly one hundred unhurt wolves—we were only twenty—and our extended line would not offer a quarter the resistance of a closer front.

I have always held that in hunting some possible chance of danger is neces-

sary to make the sport interesting, and in moments like those I passed facing that raging throng of wolves I experienced the sublime thrill that nerves the sportsman for the hand-to-hand struggle with a ferocious beast. But before the wolves had determined to attack us several rifles cracked to my left and more wolves fell. The fire became general, and reluctantly I lifted my weapon and sent two bullets crashing through the skull of a great shaggy wolf as the pack turned and ran.

Several of the blue-liveried *valets de chiens*, or whippers in, now came in sight, and as we could not expect any more wolves from that quarter we dispersed.

I struck out with Hector for a steep woody range leading down from some of the highest domes of the Pyrénées. In half an hour I gained the firwood and was gliding noiselessly over the needles toward a rocky eminence that offered a favorable position to spy any stray wolves.

I had not been there a quarter of an hour when I heard some dogs barking furiously, then came a piercing yell, as if one of them had got hurt, and then renewed barking. As the sound came nearer a large wolf bitch, followed by two small cubs, broke suddenly through the underbrush on the outskirts of the firwood. The cubs were evidently nearly exhausted and panting distressingly. The mother had faithfully protected them, and they would have found a safe refuge in that forest if I had not happened to choose it for an ambush.

She came along at a quiet trot, stopping every now and then to charge back upon the six or seven dogs that still followed her. When she turned they scattered in all directions, but their hunting instinct kept them to the trail. I had long wanted a wolf cub and I had now a chance to

procure one. I might have shot the wolf from where I was, but I hoped to be able to catch one cub without killing her. When she caught sight of us she gave a startled jump and a fierce howl. For a moment her courage deserted her, for she ran swiftly away, leaving the cubs to follow as they might. Hector was right behind them and headed them off, so that they had to run through the forest. Their yelps brought the mother back again, and like a flash she went for my big dog. He must have weighed twenty pounds heavier, but she looked as large with every hair of her shaggy coat standing on end. Teeth clashed against teeth and the howls and snarls and sharp ringing cries came fast and furious as the combatants rolled over and over. They formed such a quick-moving mass that for some seconds I could not see which was on top.

But they soon parted—the wolf ran off and Hector lay writhing on the ground. Throwing up my rifle I sent the wolf head over heels, then ran to my dog. Both his forelegs were broken, the neck torn in five different places and his nose bitten through. I shot him to save further agony. On examining the carcass of the wolf I found her ear split and a slight wound on the neck. The other dogs had come up, and together we ran down the cubs. They killed one, but I secured the other. It grew up in perfect freedom with some dogs nearly a year, but one day it disappeared and never returned. It wore a large brass collar, and when a report reached me a few weeks later that a wolf wearing such an ornament had been shot while raiding a sheepfold I accepted it as proof that "Carlo" had tired of civilization and had met his death on taking up the old freebooting ways of his ancestors.

